

Jones' Adventure
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On April 9, 1945, forty years ago last month, Dietrich

Bonhoeffer was executed by his SS guards at Flossenburg prison as ~~for his participation in a plot to assassinate~~
a traitor to the Third Reich. Bonhoeffer was a young German pastor

and a theologian with ^{an} international following. When the Nazis came to power in 1933 he was a ^{pacifist} ~~passivist~~. In time, however, his mind changed and he joined the conspiracy to assassinate Adolph Hitler. The plan failed. Bonhoeffer and others were arrested and several days before the end of the war he was hanged. On the fortieth anniversary of his death the Christian Century editorialized. "As perilous as the issues of our time may seem

Bonhoeffer's legacy reminds us that we must take sides. That indifference is the worsest form of immorality." Bonhoeffer is a reminder that to love God intentionally, to choose to be a Christian in this world is a very serious commitment. It can be an adventure at best, ^a very costly perilous business ^{at worst} and ~~worth~~.

Bonhoeffer's experience is a reminder to those of us not forced by circumstances to make a decision that will determine whether or not we will live ~~that at least~~ ⁺ there is more to life in Christian terms than simply putting in time ~~that~~ ⁺ that brief but publicly faithful life of his is a reminder that by Christian ^{sacrifice} ~~criteria~~ the meaning of a life has more to do with the traces and commitments which are made in love than the number of years that ^{life} happens to endure. From his prison cell in 1944 he wrote "a person must plunge into life. To be a Christian does not mean to

be religious in a particular way to cultivate some sort of a sectarianism or pioneer but to be a man." That is the problem. To be a whole human being. How to live life fully, how to enjoy it, how to get as much out of it as we possibly can. How to go to sleep peacefully at night with some sense that this day and the accumulation of the days I am living are adding up to something. Knowledge of our mortality is a mixed blessing. Without it we probably wouldn't create anything. Herbert Masslow recuperating from a heart attack wrote to a friend that if you knew you were not going to die you probably would never experience love or ecstasy or beauty. And yet the morbid but accurate observation that life is at least the process of dying does have a sobering effect when one stumbles upon it in the wee hours of some sleepless night. Macbeth's lament is universal - tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow creeps in this petty face from day to day to the last syllable of recorded time and all our yesterdays have lighted fools the way to dusty death _____ about brief candle. How to live, how to live with enough intentionality and commitments so that our lives transcend the power and captivity of death. That is the human question. The answer I submit is the truth the saints and martyrs have seen ____ brief. A truth lived by Jesus Christ. A truth to which the church has borne witness in its better moments. It is contained in a deceptively simple little sentence in the First Epistle of John "for we know that we have passed from death into life because we have loved a brother. That is an astounding ascertain. You move from the

morbid captivity of death into the bright fullness of life by loving your brothers and sisters. Church tradition has always linked those three brief Epistles which bear the name John to the beloved disciple. Scholarship has determined that they were written quite late, however, perhaps seventy years after the fact. If that is the case, the major agenda for the author is to get the essence of it written down before it disappears, before it gets lost. And as he thought about it, as he put his mind to work on the project of refining seventy or so years of Christian experience into words and ideas that would help others to understand. He kept returning to the idea of love. See what love the Father has given us that we should be called children of God, he wrote. There is no fear in love but perfect love passes out fear, he wrote. God is love he proposed. And the person who abides in love abides in God and God abides in that person. Students have always known that the author of these letters is really a very gifted thinker who is introducing a whole new category of religious thought. Most religions, certainly the rich Hebrew religion of Jesus relies on the idea of sin and righteousness to talk about the human condition. This author is proposing several interesting alternatives. Instead of sin and righteousness he is using darkness and light and hatred and love. He writes "God is life and in God there is no darkness at all. The one who loves his brothers and sisters abides in the light. The one who hates walks in the darkness." Now there is a very important Christian point here. It is one you and I are inclined

to forget. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is not a new set of ideas about God. It is about an incarnate love that gets itself lived in the Christian community. The Gospel is not a new philosophic system but an invitation to live a new style of life. We move from darkness to light, from dusk to light. This author proposes not by adopting more orthodox doctrines or by growing in our understanding in the mysteries of God as much as we Presbyterians like that activity, but by loving the brothers and the sisters. Ours is not a receptive climate for that basic Christian understanding, I fear. Each age has its particular challenges for the Church, some of them have been in the form of outright hostility and persecution. In other ages the challenge has come in a seductive sympathy for religion in general. Which either does not understand or does not like the essence of this Gospel. That is our situation. Our culture asks the meaning of life and the human prospect and then holds up these solitary human self as the answer and says "this is it, discover it, get into yourself, actualize it, realize it, celebrate it, indulge yourself, you deserve a break today, you are worth it, look out for number one, be your own best friend." The New York Times two weeks ago reviewed an important new book HABITS OF THE HEART. Based on four major research projects and edited by Robert Bellah, University of California, Sociologist. The book is a study of individualism in America and it concludes that individualism which when balanced with a commitment to equality is a dynamic idea. Is today tipping the scale? We are concerned the authors write that

this individualism has grown cancerous, that it may be destroying us. The Times review included the most thoughtful paragraph: "We have never before faced a situation that called our deepest assumptions so radically into question." Our problems today are not just political, they are moral and have to do with the meaning of life. We are beginning to understand that our common life requires more than an exclusive concern for material accumulation. Perhaps life is not a race whose only goal is being foremost. It would seem at first that if the goal is to get as much out of life as possible we ought to do as much for ourselves as possible. We ought to be focusing our energies, our creativity, our time and certainly our resources on this project. The only trouble is that it does not work. It ought to but it doesn't. Our best humanity is not affirmed by egotism, the best in us is not celebrated by self-indulgence. In fact, there is a sense in which the more we live for ourselves the less we are alive. Theologian Dorothy Leigh-Sayers has written a provocative little book under the title Death by Bread Alone in which she describes the behavioral terms of how deadly self-centeredness can be. And I quote "being alone and then wanting to be alone. Being friendless and then distrusting and despising others, forgetting and then being forgotten. Living only for ourselves and then feeling unneeded. Being unconcerned about others and wanting no one to be concerned about us. Neither laughing or being laughed at. Neither crying for another nor being cried for by another." The poets have understood it clearly as life style

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self-indulgence ends up denying not enhancing life. T. S. Eliot once wrote that an apt description of this civilization might be there were decent Godless people, their only monument the asphalt road and a thousand lost golf balls. Even B. A. Torrence, not an artist one would normally characterize as self-denying, once confessed "I was weary of the world, I was so sick of it, everything was tainted with myself." Well, the Gospel of Jesus Christ suggest that human life becomes good and extraordinary and exciting and interesting when we get out of ourselves. Life is an adventure in love. That is the Christian secret. In Jesus Christ, God our creator, summons us to realize the fullness of our humanity and to discover the meaning of life by shifting the focus away from the question and in the direction of others. To redirect the energy from introspection to the world outside ourselves. Its not a philosophic, by the way, the author of the Epistle moved from soaring abstraction to concrete reality, we move from death to life when we love he said and then several sentences later if anyone has the world's goods and sees someone in need, yet closes his heart, how does God love that person? Martin Marty cited a prayer recently which if we haven't prayed we certainly understand. "Use me Lord, use even me, preferably in an advisory capacity." The love that is an adventure, that is to say Christian love is tangible and practical and it has to do with flesh and blood, people who need us and flesh and blood institutions which need us. So today, in the life of this Church the rhythm is from theology to the Board of Trustees, from

thoughtful reflections on the human prospect to lengthy meetings of the education commitment. From sermons on love trying to soar the Church budget. The people who are today ordained and installed and all those who serve this or any church in pragmatic everyday ways are eloquently expressing the truth of the Gospel. Love is practical, love reaches out and makes life better and happier and safer and healthier for others. Love discovers that the happiest thing in the world is some other person's happiness.

How to live - A noble example of Dietrich Bonhoeffer suggests that there is more to the answer to that question than managing to stay a live for seventy or eighty or ninety years. It is a matter of loving and loving deeply. It is a matter of taking sides, of caring deeply about the world and all its agonizing complexities. The Christian prescription is to care deeply about life everywhere, to make choices, to learn and to develop and form opinions about some of the thorniest most controversial problems confronting the human community. To take a stand for human life in those arenas where it is not always popular nor socially acceptable to do so. The Christian prescription is to love life everywhere, to become vulnerable, to risk a broken heart everyday of our lives for the sake of love - to love so much you actually experience the hurt personally whenever and wherever human life is denied or diminished or oppressed. And to love so much that you experience the ecstasy whenever human life is affirmed or enhanced or celebrated in great part in music and a walk by the lake on a Sunday afternoon

when justice is done, or in the miracle of another person's love for you. To the ancient question how shall we live fully - the faith answers love. Love the people God gives you to love. Love them with strength and kindness and ultimate loyalty. Love them by listening to them, by taking in to your own heart their joys and hopes and aspirations and disappointments and fears. Love school and church and community, love your nation enough to expect it to be as noble as its nobelist ideals. Love it enough to weep when it is less than that. Love the whole wide wonderful world God has given and love the God who made it to give. The meaning of our humanity is established when we love enough to make choices and commitments. And when in love we put our lives in service to some great cause. Each of us decides, therefore, to live fully or not to live fully. What makes those propositions a proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus and not just sound psychological advice, is that their truth has been demonstrated? God has put life on the line. God has allowed himself to be defined as love. Love fully lived out in Jesus. Love lived in serving and teaching and healing and ultimately dying. The truth is, you and I have been loved, are loved by God. And in Jesus Christ summoned to all the glorious fullness of life as God conceived and created it. We are invited to love's adventure for life and forever in our praise in glory and wisdom in thanksgiving and honor and power and strength be to our God, forever and ever.

Amen